lighting facilities and associated facilities have been initiated by Airports Authority of Indian (AAI) at Madurai airport. AAI has also plans for construction of a new terminal building complex alongwith modern passengers amenities to handle 500 passengers at a time.

Decongestion of Passenger/Cargo Traffic at Madurai Airport

1372. SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the unused airport at Vagaikulam near Tuticorin will be put to use in order to decongest the passenger and cargo traffic at Madurai airport; and

(b) whether there is any proposal to start reusing the Salem air strip in Tamil Nadu?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Decision to make operation an unused airport depends *inter-alia* on the existence of firm commitments from scheduled airlines to start air services. Airports Authority of India has not received any proposal from airlines to operate scheduled passenger/cargo service through Vagaikulam airstrip near Tuticorin and the airport at Salem.

Improvement of Infrastructure of Indian Airlines

1373. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) how does Indian Airlines compare with private airlines in India and air India with other International Airways in terms of safety, cost effectiveness, technology and service;

(b) what are the major hurdles for Indian Airlines to match with other Airlines;

(c) whether it is a system failure or human failure or both; and

(d) what are the major steps proposed or taken to improve in terms of infrastructure, manpower and management?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) The performance of the national

carriers compares favourably with private domestic airlines and foreign carriers. However, there is always scope for improvement in different areas of operations.

(b) and (c) Both the airlines being public sector undertakings face some competitive disadvantage *vis-a-vis* their private sector counterparts. In particular, the process of decision making involves various procedures and levels and as such takes a longer time. Besides, the two national carriers are also required to fulfil certain socio-economic obligations.

(d) Both the airlines constantly endeavour to take measures to improve their product and remain competitive in the market. The airlines are in the process of acquiring modern aircraft in order to revamp their fleet.

Merger of IA with AI

1374. SHRI SITARAM YECHURY: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal for the merger of the Indian Airlines with Air India;

(b) if so, what is the basis of the proposal and what are the expected advantages;

(c) whether Government have consulted the trade unions and employees associations on this matter; and

(d) if so, what is their opinion?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Although the Government's attempt is to ensure better synergy between two national carriers, there is no proposal for their merger.

(b) to (d) Do not arise.

Mountain Airlines for North-Eastern Region

1375. SHRI R.P. GOENKA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is fact that a proposal has been mooted to establish a mountain airlines to cater to the specific needs of the North-Eastern Region which is always susceptible to vagaries of the weather;